



U.S. Department of Justice

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PRESS RELEASE

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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE ANNOUNCES CONVICTION AND SENTENCINGS OF COLOMBIAN NATIONALS EXTRADITED FOR MURDER OF U.S. NATIONAL DURING HOSTAGE-TAKING IN 2001

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Six Colombian citizens have been convicted and sentenced to terms of between 20 and 30 years in prison for their roles as members of a violent terrorist group which, between 1997 and 2001, was responsible for numerous hostage takings and the brutal murder of a United States national in the Republic of Ecuador, U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia Kenneth L. Wainstein, Department of Justice Criminal Division Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher, and Special Agent in Charge of the Miami Field Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Jonathan I. Solomon, announced today.

The announcement was made following the partial unsealing of the matter today in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

Specifically, the defendants were sentenced for the offenses of Conspiracy to Commit Hostage-Taking, Hostage-Taking and Hostage-Taking Resulting in Death and Murder of a United States National. Defendants Gerardo Herrera-Iles, 42, Jose del Carmen Alvarez-Iles, 52, Cristobal Alvarado-Herrera, 31, Henri Jamioy Quistial, 32, and Juan Luis Bravo, 30, all citizens of Colombia, and Robert Henry Escobar Villamil, 37, a citizen of Ecuador, were each sentenced this week by the Honorable Henry H. Kennedy, Jr.

According to the government's investigation, from the 1990's through 2001, members of the group took hostage nationals of the United States and other countries in order to compel third persons to pay ransoms as an explicit condition for their release. The United States nationals were working in Ecuador on a variety of road construction and oil pipeline projects. This group and their co-conspirators targeted locations where United States and other foreign nationals worked and traveled; conducted surveillance on them; attacked them using deadly force; and marched them into the jungles of Ecuador where they were bound and threatened at gunpoint for months until large ransoms were paid. The group had mixed motives in that they

committed hostage takings and murders for profit and as a means of furthering their struggle against multi-national companies.

This group used extreme violence in order to carry out their hostage-takings, which included the violent murder of United States national, Ronald Clay Sander, 54, of Sunrise Beach, Missouri, and an employee of the Tulsa, Oklahoma based company, Helmerich and Payne, Inc.; the murder of construction project guards and other workers; and the destruction by means of explosives of a gas pipeline and an oil pipeline, the latter resulting in the incineration of six foreign nationals and the extensive burning of close to 20 other foreign nationals.

Specifically, the government's investigation showed that, among other things,

- ◆ In 1997, members of this group, and other co-conspirators attacked and took a group of construction company workers hostage in the province of Sucumbios, Republic of Ecuador. The workers were detained and threatened at gunpoint until a \$150,000 ransom was paid.
- ◆ In 1998, members of this group and other co-conspirators, attacked and took numerous hostages, including two U.S. nationals, working in the province of Sucumbios, Republic of Ecuador. The three hostages were force marched into the jungle and detained at gunpoint until a \$250,000 ransom was paid. This group shot and wounded two Ecuadoran nationals as they tried to escape the original attack.
- ◆ In 1999, members of this group and other co-conspirators, took one United States national, seven Canadian nationals, two Spanish nationals and one Belgian national hostage in the province of Sucumbios, Republic of Ecuador. The United States national and the Canadian nationals, were force-marched into the jungle and detained at gunpoint until a \$3.5 million ransom was paid. This group shot and killed an Ecuadoran national who was working as a guard during the original attack.
- ◆ In 2000, members of this group and other co-conspirators, took five U.S. nationals, one Chilean national, one Argentine national and one New Zealand national hostage in the province of Orellana, Republic of Ecuador. These hostages were force-marched into the jungle and detained at gunpoint for months, until a \$13 million ransom was paid. Prior to the payment of the \$13 million ransom, this group had demanded an \$80 million ransom. As a means of pressuring the companies into raising their counter ransom offer, the group blew up two pipelines burning six Ecuadoran nationals to death and leaving close to 20 other Ecuadoran nationals covered in 30 - 80 % burns. When their demand still was not met, this group shot and killed U. S. national Ronald Clay Sander in January 2001 by shooting him multiple times and leaving his body on the side of a road near Santa Rosa de Sucumbios covered with a sheet that had a spray-painted message: "I am a gringo. For nonpayment of ransom. HP Company."

The five Colombian defendants were brought to the United States following the entry of orders of extradition by the Colombian Supreme Court and President Uribe of Colombia. That extradition was the first extradition by Colombia to the United States of any of its citizens for terrorism offenses. In order to obtain the extradition of these defendants to this country, the United States assured the government of Colombia that if Colombia permitted the extradition of these defendants, the United States would not seek the death penalty or a sentence of life imprisonment in the courts of the United States. The five Colombian defendants were then extradited from Colombia. Subsequently, each of the defendants entered guilty pleas to offenses such as hostage-taking, conspiracy to commit hostage-taking resulting in death, hostage-taking resulting in death, and murder of a U.S. national outside the United States.

In announcing the sentences, U.S. Attorney Wainstein and Assistant Attorney General Fisher commended the outstanding investigative work of the Extraterritorial Squad of the Miami Field Office of the F.B.I., the contributions of the Office of the FBI Legal Attache, Bogota, Colombia, the Miami-Dade Medical Examiner's Office, the national Anti-Kidnaping Unit of the Prosecutor's Office of Colombia (la Fiscalia General de la Nacion), the Anti-Kidnapping Units of the Colombian National Police, Colombian Army and Colombian Navy (the "GAULA"), the Anit-Kidnapping Unit of the Ecuadoran National Police (the "UNASE"), the Ecuadoran Army, and praised the work of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia and the Counterterrorism Section of the Department of Justice's Criminal Division, who jointly handled the matter, in particular, victim-witness advocate Yvonne Bryant, former Assistant U.S. Attorney John A. Beasley, who prosecuted the cases, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeanne M. Hauch, who handled the sentencings.

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